Lesson 15 –Developing the Course of Action
Estimated time to complete: 45 minutes

The lesson contains four sets of instruction. You will:

- Develop a new Course of Action (COA) for your training incident.
- Estimate a cost for your proposed COA.
- Learn how to edit Action Items.
- Learn how to delete Action Items.

You created a pending decision for your incident in Lesson 12, and will eventually publish the new COA in the completed decision document in a later lesson. Since the WFDSS 101 lessons are intended to guide a student through the decision documentation for a training incident and no two training incidents are alike, the exercises contained in this lesson provide guidance to help you develop inputs for your training exercise or scenario.
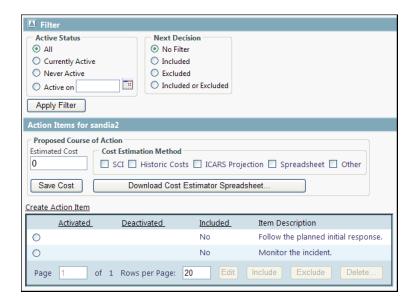
Course of Action (COA)

The COA tab is where Incident Owners and Editors develop and document a COA comprised of one or more Action Items that will accomplish the Incident Objectives and Requirements developed for an incident (Lesson 14, ***Objectives and Requirements***). The COA should express the leader's (Agency Administrator) intent, and should be aligned with the direction provided in the delegation of authority.

The COA can be the preplanned response or a new set of Action Items, whichever is appropriate for the management of the incident. A COA and its associated estimated cost are required parts of a decision and a decision cannot be accomplished without each.

On the COA tab, you can:

- Develop and document Action Items to be included in pending decisions and manage Action Items that are included or excluded in previous, current, or pending decisions.
- Filter the Action Item list to determine the active status for each, or quickly identify which are included or excluded from a pending decision.
- Document an estimated cost for a proposed COA, and select the cost estimation method used to develop it.

The two most common Action Items are automatically included in the COA; *Follow the planned initial response* and *Monitor the incident,* as in the graphic below. If you completed ***Lesson 12, Validation and Creating a Pending Decision***, you determined that the preplanned response was not a valid COA and you excluded it from the list. As a result, it should have a *No* beside it as in the example below. *Monitor the incident* is commonly included in the COA, especially if an Incident Objective is to allow a fire to burn for resource benefit or protect wilderness resource values. If Monitoring is a valid management response, include it in the proposed COA.

Preplanned Course of Action

The preplanned response is automatically included as an Action Item for each new incident in WFDSS and it is typically successful for managing a fire. When the complexities of an incident exceed the capabilities of initial attack resources and a new COA is needed, the pre-planned response is no longer valid. The pre-planned response should be excluded from the COA and a new COA developed. Each time an approver determines that the current COA will not meet the incident objectives and requirements, a new COA and potentially, a new decision is needed.

In most cases, a pre-planned Course of Action (COA) exists for the landscape. The first decision for any incident is to determine whether or not the pre-planned COA is valid for the specific incident. If you are working through the suite of WFDSS 101 exercises, you did this in Lesson 12. If the answer is Yes, then no decision needs to be documented, and you can continue to assess the situation. However, if the answer is No, then you need to document the new COA, validate it, and create a decision document.

For example, the pre-planned COA might be to manage natural ignitions to achieve desired Land and Resource Management Plan objectives when risk is within acceptable limits. However, the weather forecast for this incident indicates wind gusts of 25mph and a town is in the predicted path of the fire. This scenario requires you to devise a new COA, validate it, and create a decision document.

Developing a New Course of Action

The new COA is comprised of one or more Action Items that an Incident Owner or Editor develops to accomplish Incident Objectives and Requirements. You can:

- Create new Action Items,

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- Reuse Action Items published in previous decisions, or
- Exclude Action Items published in previous decisions.

The Course of Action and its Estimated Cost are auto-populated in the decision content. Using the Decision Editor, you can add, as appropriate, supporting text, map images, analysis outputs or pictures to clarify the COA or Estimated Cost, but only after a pending decision is created on the Decisions tab.

> **Caution:** Do not embed external links into the decision or report. They will be stripped from the content when the information is copied into a rich text editor field.

Developing Action Items for a Course of Action

When creating an Action Item, ask yourself, "Will the proposed action accomplish an Incident Objective and/or Requirement?" If the answer is no, modify the Action Item or determine if the Action Item will achieve an Incident Objective or Requirement that hasn't yet been created. As a result, creating a Course of Action can help you identify gaps in your Incident Objectives and Requirements.

For example, you may develop Action Items that address monitoring smoke conditions by signing or closing roads or posting smoke monitors in key areas. If no Incident Objectives or Requirements mention smoke management, create a Management Requirement that reads *"Monitor smoke conditions and minimize impacts to motorists."* The Action Items may also fulfill the Incident Requirement *"Provide for public and firefighter safety".* There's no right way to document an incident, but both of these examples would be effective ways to document smoke management in this case.

If you prefer, you can develop the COA before you develop the Incident Objectives and Requirements, as in the example above. Whichever method you choose, the Incident Objectives and Requirements and resulting COA should still tier off of the Strategic Objectives and Management Requirements from the affected Unit's planning documents.

Create Action Items in a way that an individual Action Item can be easily excluded from a pending decision if no longer applicable. For example, if you have a bulleted list of actions that you've added to one Action Item, you would have to exclude the entire Action Item if one or more of the bullets are no longer applicable, and then retype all of those Action Items that still are.

In the example below, taken from lesson 14, notice how the Action Items tier off of the Incident Objectives and Requirements, and how the Incident Objectives and Requirements tier off of the Strategic Objectives and Management Requirements. Each bulleted Action Item would be typed as an individual entry in WFDSS.

Strategic Objectives	Incident Objectives	Action Items
Measures for the protection of cultural resources from vandalism & natural destruction will include	Minimize suppression related impacts to Sandia Wilderness	• Monitor fire and personnel activities

regular inspection and, where necessary, electronic monitoring. Allow fire to play a natural role in Wilderness	Area, and natural and cultural resources in David Canyon.	around ruins to ensure there is no damage to cultural resources. • Utilize trail systems, changes in vegetation, and natural barriers where possible. • Monitor location of all active flanks of the fire, in and around the Monument.
Protect public & private facilities to prevent loss through wildfire.	Provide for FF and public safety. Prevent loss and damage to all private and public facilities within and near the fire area that include the Visitor's Center and Cedro Campground.	• To protect structures, modify & improve fuel breaks & roads in preparation for the fire leaving the withdrawal area. • Monitor incident from aircraft to determine timing and need for structure protection.
Increase the public awareness of the necessity to use fire as a management tool. Accomplish through news releases, etc.	Ensure timely and accurate information on the fire status, strategies, and potential smoke impacts to local communities, the public, and adjacent land managers.	Ensure qualified PIO staffs are assigned to the incident and providing fire information to the public and involved agencies. Through joint press releases from Sandia RD & KAFB, keep public the public informed.
Management Requirements	**Incident Requirements**	**Action Items**
Use of appropriate responses with the intent of minimizing the loss of natural resources & improvements, protecting cultural & historic resources & checking fire spread onto private property	Actions taken on the fire will minimize loss and damage to resources. Utilize MIST tactics. Get approval from District Ranger before using mechanical equipment in Sandia Wilderness.	• Coordinate fire management efforts with Kirtland AFB.
Mechanical equipment in Wilderness must be authorized prior to use.		• Ensure authorization for mechanized equipment is obtained. • Assign a qualified field Resource Advisor to work with firefighters to determine mechanized equipment use and oversee rehab needs.

Limit access to military withdrawal area to existing maintained roads.	To reduce risk to firefighters, do not leave maintained road system in the withdrawal area.	Limit travel to roads 22, 41 and 44.
Smoke management & air quality requirements & reporting procedures for Bernalillo County & NMED where applicable will be followed.	Air quality and smoke management requirements and reporting will be met.	• Set up smoke monitoring station in Tijeras. • Appoint advisor to NMED. • Coordinate daily with NMED.

Examples of Objectives and Requirements and associated Action Items

Note how the Action Items, Incident Objectives/Requirements, and Strategic Objectives and Management Requirements relate to one another. The example below breaks down the relationship between the three even further:

- **Strategic Objective**: Protection of cultural resources (FMU-specific from planning documents).
- **Incident Objective**: Minimize impacts to identified cultural resources in David Canyon (incident-specific).
- **Action Item**: Assign a resource advisor to monitor fire and personnel activities around ruins to ensure there is no damage to cultural resources (action to achieve Incident Objective).

If the planning area is modified or new Incident Objectives and Requirements are added to a pending decision, the proposed COA should be modified, as needed, to ensure that it will accomplish Incident Objectives and Requirements and address recent changes. A new COA, and a new decision, is warranted if the current, published COA no longer accomplishes Incident Objectives and Requirements.

To develop Action Items for a new COA:
This exercise is intended to be completed after you've created Incident Objectives and Requirements.

1. From the Incident List, select the incident that you would like to develop a new COA for.
2. Click **View Information**. The Incident Information page appears.
3. Click the **Objectives** tab.
4. Query for the Incident Objectives and Incident Requirements, and then identify an Incident Objective or Requirement you would like to create an Action Item for.
5. Ask yourself, "What actions need to be taken to successfully achieve the selected objective or requirement?" for example, if an Incident Objective is to protect structures, how should structures be protected? The Action Items you create will guide the actions of incident management teams and/or the resources assigned to an incident.
6. Click the **Courses of Action** tab, and then click **Create Action Item**.
7. Type the Action Item in the space provided. Continuing with the protecting structures example, the Action Item might be "wrap structures as needed" or "utilize direct and/or indirect tactics to protect structures as safety permits". When you are finished, Click **Save** to type the next Action Item or **Return** to return to the COA page.

Estimating Cost for a Proposed Course of Action

On the COA tab, Incident Owners and/or Editors must document the:

- Estimated Cost of implementation for the proposed COA, and
- Cost Estimation Method used.

The Estimated Cost is a required component of any decision and may be used to:

- Determine the signing authority for an incident for some agencies, and/or
- Prioritize incidents in a geographic area.

The 2012 Interagency Standards for Fire and Fire Aviation Operations contains additional Agency-specific information regarding WFDSS.

To estimate a cost for your COA you can use:

- The cost estimate spreadsheet (available for download on the COA tab and from WFDSS Home > Related Resources > Tools)
- Stratified Cost Index
- Historic costs for incidents of similar size and complexity
- ICARS Projections
- Spreadsheets
- Other methods

You can publish a decision without selecting a cost estimation method. If you choose a method not listed on the COA tab, use the Decision Editor to document the method and your reasoning. You can add supporting text or images to support the method(s) you chose to use.

To document a cost estimate for the proposed COA:
1. From the Incident List, select the incident that you would like to document the Estimated Cost for.
2. Click **View Information**. The Incident Information page appears.
3. Click the **Course of Action** tab.
4. Add an **Estimated Cost** to the Proposed Course of Action section.
5. Select the **Cost Estimation Method** used to determine the Estimated Cost for the COA. If the method isn't listed, select **Other**
6. If **Other** was selected in Step 5, describe the method used in the Courses of Action Content using the Decision Editor (The Decision Editor will be discussed in a later lesson).

Editing an Action Item

Incident Owners and Editors can edit the Course of Action until it is included in a pending decision that has been submitted for review.

To edit an Action Item:
1. From the Incident list, select the incident you want to edit Action Items for.
2. Click **View Information**. The Edit Incident page appears.

3. Select **Course of Action**. The Course of Action page appears with a list of Action Items.
4. Select the Action Item you want to edit.
5. Click **Edit**. The Edit Action item page appears.
6. Edit the Action Item. Be as specific as possible. Remember, this information will appear in the published decision and will guide the actions of incident management teams and resources assigned to the fire.
7. Click **Save**. The COA list reappears with the newly added Action Items at the top of the list.

Deleting an Action Item

Incident Owners and Editors can delete Action Items that have not been included in a published decision.

To delete an Action Item:

1. From the Incident list, select the incident you want to delete Action Items for.
2. Click **View Information**. The Edit Incident page appears.
3. Select **Course of Action**. The Course of Action page appears with a list of Action Items.
4. Select the Action Item you want to delete.
5. Click **Delete**.
6. When asked if you are sure you want to delete the Action Item, click **OK**. The Action Item has been removed from the list.

Publishing a Course of Action

When an Action Item is published in a decision for the first time, it becomes activated and is time-stamped with the date the decision is published. Action Items can be reused in or excluded from future decisions. If an Action Item is excluded from a future decision, it is deactivated and time-stamped with the date the decision is published with the excluded Action Item. Once you've excluded an Action Item and published a decision without it, the system deactivates it; the Action Item is not available for use in future decisions. If you want to include a deactivated Action Item in a future decision, you must recreate it.

Deletion is not the same thing as deactivation. Action Items are deactivated by the WFDSS application when you exclude them from a decision, but they cannot be deleted because they were included in a previously published decision. You can only delete Action Items that have not been included in a published decision.

Search for these related topics in the help:

- Course of Action
- Completing a Course of Action
- Developing Action Items
- Deleting Action Items

- <u>Adding Text to a Decision</u>
- <u>Adding an Image to a Decision</u>
- <u>Adding Incident Content to a Decision</u>
- <u>Estimating Cost for a Course of Action</u>